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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 008745

SIPDIS

NSC STAFF FOR SINGH

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SUBJECT: THE BELL RINGS FOR ROUND TWO OF EGYPT'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: CAIRO 8566 AND PREVIOUS

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶11. (C) Egypt's second round of parliamentary elections--in Alexandria, and eight other governorates, where approximately 1700 candidates are competing for 144 seats--were conducted on November 20 amidst GOE arrests of Muslim Brotherhood activists and multiple reports of attacks by NDP "bullies" on supporters of MB candidates. Official results will not be available before November 21, and we expect that as with the first round, more than half of the races will be go to run-offs. Early indications on election day are that NDP activists at the governorate level are doing what they can, both legally and extra-legally, to avoid a repeat of the MB's dramatic first round parliamentary gains. Domestic monitors have also faced harassment and some violence from NDP supporters. As in the first round, the security forces have taken a neutral role, but they were not successful in controlling violence in some cases. The Ambassador called Minister of Investment (and NDP reformist), Mahmoud Mohieldin, to convey USG concern about the violence. Mohieldin promised to convey our message in party corridors. The Ambassador also reached out to Gamal Mubarak and left the same message with a senior aide. Minister of Justice Aboul Leil gave a press conference at 1900 local time in which he laid the blame for the violence squarely on the MB and criticized the satellite channels for mis-reporting. End summary.

The Gloves Come Off

¶12. (C) The day started with reports carried by the local and international media of 200-300 arrests, depending on the source, of Muslim Brotherhood activists in five of the nine governorates where voting is taking place. The Independent Coalition on Election Monitoring (ICEM, which is supported by USAID and MEPI funding, as well as technical assistance from NDI and IRI) described the arrests as "systematic" and said that they targeted MB poll-watchers and candidate agents. Comment: Arrests of these MB activists presumably would weaken the MB's ability to detect and report fraud in particular races. End comment.

Additional violations reported by ICEM, which said they had about 1500 monitors in the field, included the following:

--Polls opened late in 65 percent of the stations observed.

--Restrictions continue to be imposed on domestic observers, including wide-scale denial of access to polling stations, as well as an instance of physical assaults on a two observers by NDP supporters in Ismailia.

--Attacks by NDP supporters ("Beltaguin," in Arabic, which can be translated as "bullies" or "thugs") on independent/MB supporters in a number of locations, especially in Alexandria, but also in Gharbiya, Ismailia, and Port Said.

--Widespread, ongoing campaigning by supporters of all candidates, including immediately outside polling stations, which is outlawed.

--In a report issued at 1600 hours local time, ICEM reported that violent incidents appeared to be increasing over the course of the day. ICEM alleged that there had been at least two fatalities in Alexandria and multiple other incidents around the country of election-day violence. ICEM asserted that "As the election process unfolds, it is becoming obvious that there is an organized campaign of violence with little or no effective police intervention or prevention."

--Also late in the day, the Egyptian Association for Supporting Democracy (EASD, a MEPI grantee) issued a statement condemning assaults by NDP thugs on its chairman, Hamada Mansoor, a regular Embassy contact. EASD also charged that at least eight other EASD monitors had been beaten in

Alexandria, Beheira, Port Said, and Qena.

13. (C) Emboffs deployed on November 20 to seven of the nine governorates where elections are taking place during the second round. (Emboffs assessed the polls in Alexandria, Beheira, Qalubiya, Gharbiya, Suez, Ismailia, and Fayoum. We did not visit Port Said or Qena.) Our information about problems with this round of voting tracks closely with the initial reports released by domestic monitors.

14. (C) Emboffs in the field collected many reports of irregularities and violence, although voting proceeded smoothly in some governorates, notably Suez. Problems noted by emboffs included voting list errors, vote buying, assaults, illegal campaigning, and intimidation. Police and others did not appear to take sides in the contests we observed, but in some cases they also did not take measures to contain violence or otherwise ensure the rule of law. A summary of the problems we either observed or received reliable information about includes the following:

--Thugs in Alexandria intimidated non-NDP voters and assaulted a domestic observer who was gathering information on NDP activists paying LE 50 per vote in the Mina Al-Bassal district.

--NDP activists at polling stations in Alexandria's Dukhaila district engaged in a "revolving ballots" scam, which entailed providing prospective voters with pre-marked ballots which the voters smuggled into the polling station. In the privacy of the voting booth, voters would pocket the blank ballots supplied by the voting officials. They would then deposit the pre-filled ballots in the ballot box. Upon exiting the polling station they would exchange their remaining blank ballots for payment.

--Emboffs in Alexandria said that there have been reports of several violent deaths linked to the election. (Al-Jazeera is reporting that one Mohammad Khalil, a driver for NDP-dissident candidate Hassan Hussain Hassan was killed by supporters of the official NDP candidate.)

--Emboff in Ismailia observed publicly-owned transport vehicles, some from as far away as Giza and Cairo, being used to bus voters to the polls, presumably to vote for the NDP candidate.

--Emboff in Ismailia encountered multiple Muslim Brotherhood supporters outside various polling stations who reported that roving bands of NDP thugs were moving about the city and attacking MB activists. Several MB activists displayed the wounds they had received from the NDP men. One man pulled back his collar to reveal a gash with 13 fresh stitches which he said had been inflicted during the morning's violence.

--Port Said appeared to be particularly violent. An International Republican Institute (IRI) visitor suggested that the security services were using clubs to attack MB activists. The IRI visitor reported that he was departing Port Said due to concerns about the violence.

--In the Abu Rish district of Beheira province, where MB heavyweight Gamal Hashmat reportedly "owns the streets," despite a major challenge from NDP parliamentary leader Mustafa Fiqqi, police used tear-gas to disperse a crowd of several hundred MB voters who were seeking to access the ballot station. International journalists (including the LA Times correspondent) and a representative from the International Crisis Group witnessed the tear-gassing of the MB voters.

The MB Trying to Go Toe-to-Toe?

15. (C) The MB cadres have again made their mark by their organization and logistics. Their activists were positioned outside most stations where MB candidates were running, using computerized voting lists to assist voters. In Ismailia, MB activists carrying banners outside of several stations complained that they had been set upon by women thugs from the NDP who had ripped the banners and placards from their hands. They noted that it would not have been "honorable" to respond to such assaults by women.

16. (C) There have also been sporadic reports of MB activists getting the better of NDP thugs, including in clashes in Beheira, but the overwhelming majority of reports of violence suggest that the MB has not, as a rule, initiated the violence that has occurred.

Chairman of Parliamentary Elections Commission Speaks

17. (SBU) In televised press conference at 1900 hours local,

Justice Minister Aboul Leil, who also heads the Parliamentary Elections Commission, asserted that MB activists had been the cause of the clashes. He also criticized the international Arab satellite channels for "mis-reporting."

Comment

18. (C) The MB's gains in round one appear to have surprised the GOE and the NDP. Several MB commentators opined today that the NDP is seeking to avoid the high percentage of runoffs that it faced in round one, and thus has gone on the attack early in round two. The official results of the November 20 elections should be available on November 21. We expect that any races that do go to runoffs will witness a continuation of the emotion and violence that we have already witnessed at the start of round two.

19. (C) The Ambassador called Investment Minister Mohieldin on the afternoon of November 20 to express concern about the reports of violence. Mohieldin countered that the MB had also played a role in the fighting at the polls throughout the day. Mohieldin urged the Ambassador to withhold judgment until a more thorough investigation could be conducted, but he promised to relay the Ambassador's concerns to other NDP leaders. The Ambassador also placed a call to NDP Policies Committee Chairman Gamal Mubarak who was unavailable. Karim Haggag, Gamal's foreign policy advisor, promised to convey our concerns to his boss. End comment.

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